Framework for the GNWT Response to Homelessness

Northwest Territories

January 2007

Introduction

Smaller NWT communities do not have emergency or transitional shelters, and according to preliminary research, they do not have many people living without shelter. Rather than dealing with homelessness, as this framework defines the term, residents in smaller communities contend with issues of over-crowding and "couch-surfing". These issues are discussed in more detail on the following page.

Homelessness and over-crowding are considered to be different issues in this framework. This framework identifies that people who live without shelter or at emergency or transitional shelters are homeless. With this definition, the majority of the NWT's homeless are in the larger communities of Yellowknife, Inuvik and Hay River. Many of the people who are homeless in these larger centres have migrated from various small communities across the NWT.

According to service providers in Yellowknife, Inuvik and Hay River interviewed in 2005, there are more than one hundred men, women and children living in a homeless situation in the NWT at any given time. Whether they seek shelter at an emergency facility or access temporary or emergency housing through a service agency they are considered to be homeless.

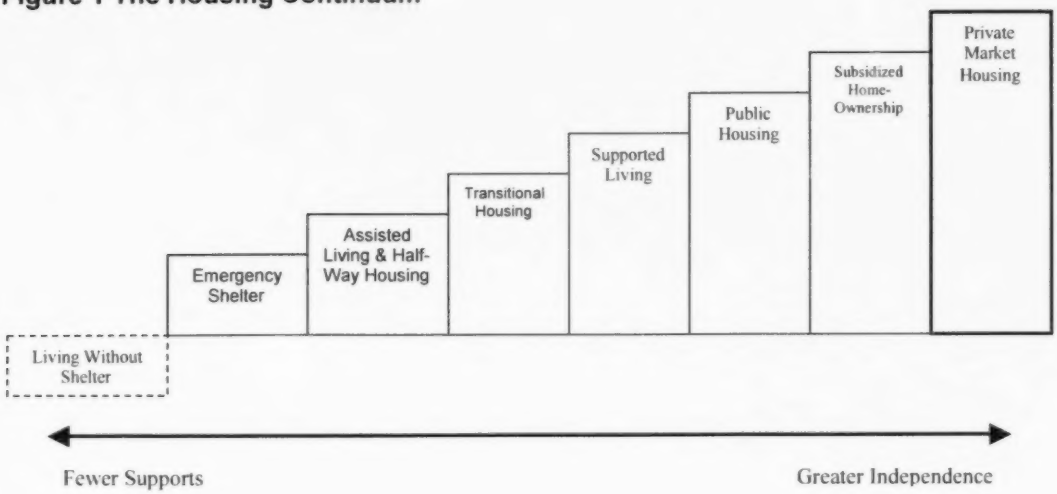
Service providers who operate emergency and transitional facilities in the NWT report that Yellowknife has the greatest homeless population. As is the case in other regional centres such as Inuvik and Hay River, many homeless come from other NWT communities, and some from other provinces and territories.

Front-line service providers have noted that many homeless persons have hard-to-resolve and long-term mental health and addictions issues. GNWT services such as Income Support or Child Protection or the RCMP are often unable to resolve their homelessness.

A troubling trend for the team of territorial and municipal governments and service agencies is the rise in homelessness witnessed by front-line providers. The rise in homelessness is occurring at the same time the NWT economy is strengthening and employment opportunities are expanding.

Figure 1 below portrays the "Housing Continuum" as laid out in the 2005 Homelessness Report. A description of each step is provided in the section 2005 Homelessness Report Recommendations – The Housing Continuum.

Figure 1 The Housing Continuum



Purpose of this Framework

Homelessness issues do not fit neatly into one department's mandate. This Framework states the importance of departments and agencies working together to address homelessness issues. Senior management of the Social Program departments commits to working together. This framework also identifies the expectations that senior managers have of staff and regional authorities with respect to homelessness.

Our common understanding of homelessness

This Framework uses the definition of homelessness from the GNWT report *Homelessness in the NWT: Recommendations to Improve the GNWT Response.* Homelessness is defined as:

> *men, women, youth and/or families living without shelter, or temporarily at emergency shelters or in government-sponsored transitional housing.*

Our understanding of over-crowding and couch-surfing

The homeless are visible in regional centres such as Yellowknife, Inuvik and Hay River. In smaller communities, problems such as over-crowding and "couch-surfing" are often evident. In the NWT, overcrowding is largely a different issue from homelessness.

The Northwest Territories Housing Corporation publishes the Housing Needs Survey every four years. This survey identifies trends in housing suitability, adequacy,

affordability and overall core need. The most recent report was published in 2004 and provides important data about overcrowding in the NWT's communities.

Table 1 Percentage of Households Considered Overcrowded, 2004

Percentage of Households Considered Overcrowded, 2004		
Beaufort-Delta	Aklavik	8%
	Fort McPherson	14%
	Holman	6%
	Inuvik	8%
	Paulatuk	26%
	Sachs Harbour	9%
	Tsiigehtchic	13%
	Tuktoyaktuk	15%
Sahtu	Colville Lake	27%
	Deline	19%
	Fort Good Hope	20%
	Norman Wells	2%
	Tulita	16%
Nahendeh	Fort Liard	16%
	Fort Simpson	12%
	Jean Marie River	25%
	Nahanni Butte	0%
	Trout Lake	10%
	Wrigley	9%
South Slave	Enterprise	4%
	Fort Providence	15%
South Slave	Fort Resolution	8%
	Fort Smith	5%
	Hay River	8%
	Hay River Reserve	20%
	Kakisa	14%
	Lutselk'e	18%
North Slave	Detah	13%
	N'dilo	33%
	Gameti	16%
	Behchoko	33%
	Wekweti	19%
	Wha Ti	19%
	Yellowknife	6%

NWT Housing Corporation; Housing Needs Survey, 2004. P.3

Overcrowding is when a household does not have enough bedrooms considered appropriate for the number of residents. In some communities, cultural and historical factors may lead to larger household sizes that appear as overcrowding in the NWTHC Housing Survey.

Across the NWT, there were 1,291 households considered overcrowded by the Housing Needs Survey. This represents 9% of the total number of households in the NWT. Generally, the smaller the community, the greater the incidence of what are considered overcrowded households.

In communities where overcrowding is prevalent, one solution may be to increase the affordable housing stock. A promising initiative is the Novel Project, which intends to convert trailers used in the creation of the Mackenzie Gas Pipeline to provide affordable housing stock in communities near to the development. The Federal government's May 2006 budget included $50 million in support of housing in the NWT.

This highlights the difference between overcrowding and homelessness; the solution to homelessness is not the addition of more housing units. Many homeless individuals and families have complex needs and challenges that make it very difficult to successfully manage a private dwelling. This Framework addresses the need for social and economic supports for the NWT's homeless, not those living in overcrowded situations. In particular, the Framework calls for implementation of the Social Program departments' 2005 Homelessness Report recommendations.

2005 Homelessness Report Recommendations – The Housing Continuum

This Framework relies on the concept of the "Housing Continuum" from Social Program departments' 2005 Homelessness Report. This Housing Continuum suggests that a variety of supports spanning the range of full support to full independence are required to address the diverse needs and challenges of homeless individuals and families.

Just as the needs of different individuals may be unique, the needs of one individual may change over time. The network of supports must be flexible enough to meet the needs of the homeless at any given time in their progression to a state of independence. It must also be realized that for some individuals, independence will not be achieved. There is also a need for supports that are long-term or permanent in duration.

The Social Program departments will first attempt to provide for supports at the beginning of the continuum, for the homeless nearest a state of living without shelter. As a greater level of support is achieved at the beginning of the spectrum, the departments will then be able to expand the options for those living in various types of shelter, closer to the independence end of the housing continuum.

Emergency Shelters

Separate facilities are required for single men, single women, women with children, and youth. This type of shelter is intended for the short-term, as an immediate support when an individual has become homeless. Shelters for single men and women usually provide a cot on which to sleep, and may provide shower and washroom facilities. Examples are the Salvation Army and Centre for Northern Families in Yellowknife, and Turning Point in Inuvik. For women and children, emergency shelters usually provide a room with bedroom furniture. Examples are Alison McAteer House in Yellowknife, and the Family Support Centre in Hay River. Shelters are connected to a wide range of other services and service providers, such as counselling and healthcare.

Assisted Living (including Halfway Houses and Group Homes)

Assisted Living facilities accept individuals with mental health challenges, including those recovering from addictions. They provide significant structure and support for their clients. Individuals who reside in these facilities may be expected to progress to a stage of more independent living or they may require this type of assistance indefinitely. An example is the Rycon Group Home in Yellowknife run by the YWCA.

Transitional Housing
Housing is provided at a nominal rent. Most of these individuals are accessing a variety of social services. They will continue to be assisted even when these clients are able to move to other housing options, often public housing or subsidized rental housing. An example is Rockhill Apartments in Yellowknife, operated by the YWCA.

Supported Living
At present, supported living exists in Yellowknife through the YWCA, but only for those with physical or minor cognitive disabilities. Support may be in the form of visits from caseworkers or mentors. Those who require supported living have a permanent residence that may be either Public Housing or a private residence. Support may only be required for a short time while the recipient becomes independent, or may be required for life.

Public Housing
The GNWT through the NWTHC and its Local Housing Organizations (LHO) provide Public Housing, at subsidized rental rates. Some of these clients are also supported by various social services.

Subsidized Home-Ownership
The NWTHC offers a variety of programs to assist eligible NWT residents to own a private home.

Private Market Housing
This is the final destination of the housing continuum, representative of independent living.

Some people may wish or expect that each and every person could be successful on their own. In reality, there are and always will be people who require significant support and are never able to live independently. The "Housing Continuum" is more effective when a variety of options or steps are available to support individuals and families journeying from a state of homelessness to greater independence and adequate housing.

The solution for many of the NWT's homeless lies with expanding the number and variety of options for Transitional Living, Assisted Living and Supported Living within the "Housing Continuum". The Social Program departments understand that the issues behind "homelessness" are more complex than simply providing housing. The necessary housing supports are likely not traditional single-family units. Furthermore, housing supports must be coupled with health and social services, economic and employment support services. Many supportive services, both social and economic, are needed to address homelessness.

Our Shared Commitments

The Minister of Health and Social Services was assigned responsibilities for homelessness issues in 2004. Responsibility for coordinating efforts targeted at homelessness within the GNWT and at federal/provincial/territorial meetings now lies with the Minister.

Social Program Ministers work collaboratively through the regular meetings of the Social Programs departments. These include:

- Minister, Education, Culture and Employment;
- Minister, Health and Social Services;
- Minister, Justice;
- Minister responsible for the Housing Corporation; and
- Minister, Municipal and Community Affairs.

The Deputy Ministers also work collaboratively to support the Ministers' Committee.

Our Shared Goals

- To ensure that there are support and counselling services to assist those people who are at risk of becoming homeless, so that they successfully remain in their homes.
- To ensure that there are programs and services that can assist homeless people to find housing options with appropriate support services.
- To increase the number of supported living arrangements available to northerners.
- To provide financial support to the non-government organizations that operate supported living facilities such as emergency, transitional and assisted living housing.

Our Shared Principles

Collaboration

The Social Programs departments value and respect the work of the many other agencies and partners that provide front line services for the homeless, such as the non-governmental organizations, religious organizations and the RCMP. We also work with the regional authorities, community governments and the federal government to develop policies and programs that can better meet the needs of the homeless. This collaboration is also reflected in our willingness to work together in a case management approach to respond to the health, social, economic and employment needs of individual clients.

Coordination

The Social Program departments are committed to reducing the conflicts between their programs and policies as much as possible and improving their communications with each other about those programs. These actions will reduce the potential for one department's services to inadvertently create unanticipated consequences for the programs of another department.

NGO programs need GNWT financial support.

The GNWT recognizes that:

- non-government organizations are the front-line service providers for the homeless;
- NGOs require predictable and multi-year financial support; and
- terms and conditions of contribution funding need to support the flexibility of the non-government organization.

Our Next Steps

1. Health and Social Services, in consultation with other departments and NGOs, will prepare a plan and budget to support additional options in the Housing Continuum, including such factors as standards for the options and the locations of these housing options.

2. Health and Social Services and the Housing Corporation will collaborate on the 2007 Housing Needs Survey questionnaire in order to better capture homelessness and "couch-surfing".

3. Health and Social Services will collaborate with agencies about establishing a Territorial Homelessness Emergency Funding Advisory Panel to guide the administration of a GNWT emergency financial contributions fund. This panel could include representatives from one or two NGO service-providers and one or two Social Program departments.

   The funds to be administered by the Panel would include the Transportation Assistance Fund and other contribution funding.

4. The Social Program departments will work together to improve coordination and reduce program conflicts where they affect the homeless.